



The President's Daily Brief

23 January 1970

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Sino-Soviet

(Page 1)

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50X1

Fighting in Laos intensifies as the enemy's seasonal counterattack begins. (Page 2)

West Germany continues its overtures toward the east, in spite of Berlin troubles. (Page 3)

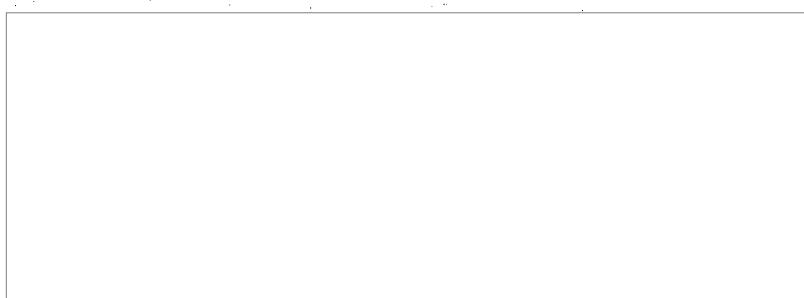
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USSR - COMMUNIST CHINA



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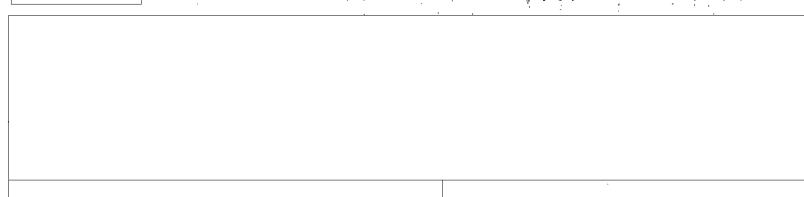


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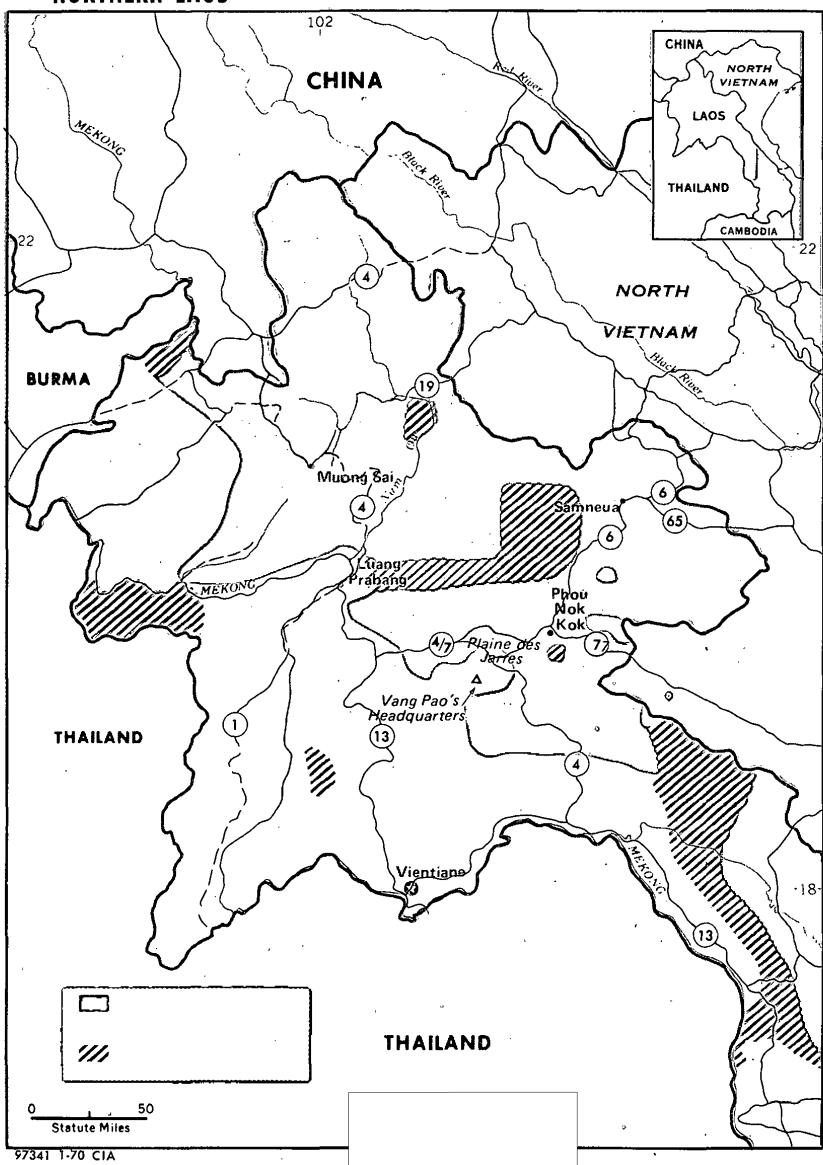
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NORTHERN LAOS



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LAOS

The latest [redacted] from Vientiane indicates that enemy forces, mainly North Vietnamese, have seized the initiative east and north of the Plaine des Jarres and now threaten Lao government forces with a multipronged offensive. Enemy strength for this expected drive could be as many as 14,000 North Vietnamese troops and 8,000 Laotian Communist and pro-Communist neutralist forces. Against this force General Vang Pao has only about 6,000 widely scattered and battle weary troops.

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So far the Communists have limited themselves to mopping up pockets of government troops on the extreme approaches to the Plaine; major attacks could commence, however, before Tet begins on 6 February. By then the Communists will have had time to replace their heavy losses taken earlier this month while capturing Phou Nok Kok, the government hill position which had barred Communist progress toward the Plaine from the east along Route 7.

The resistance of government units to determined North Vietnamese attacks will, according to observers in the field, probably be shortlived. The speed of enemy progress will depend to a considerable degree on the amount of air support government forces receive. An important key to slowing down the offensive lies in destroying the enemy's supply depots and headquarters units from the air; rarely do the North Vietnamese launch major attacks before a more adequate supply base has been established.

To this [redacted] we would only add that the government never expected to hold the Plaine des Jarres. In that area, as in the rest of Laos, there is a definite seasonal pattern to the ebb and flow of territorial control by the opposing forces. This year, however, there is a danger that the Communists might not stop at the Plaine. They might be tempted to push southward against Vang Pao's main headquarters. His Meos have become formidable antagonists to whom the North Vietnamese might hope to administer a decisive defeat.

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WEST GERMANY

In the face of Soviet criticism aimed at the Bundestag committee meetings in Berlin, the West Germans are adopting a conciliatory attitude. Although contending the present level of political activities is not provocative, they remain willing to negotiate with the Communists on the problem.

Persistent difficulties in Berlin notwithstanding, Chancellor Brandt sent off a letter to East German Premier Stoph yesterday proposing formal talks on the renunciation of force. Brandt's state-of-the-nation address last week had included an announcement of his intention to send such a message. The letter suggests that the foundation for an all-German agreement be the series of principles in Brandt's speech instead of Ulbricht's draft treaty of last December or a West German "countertreaty."

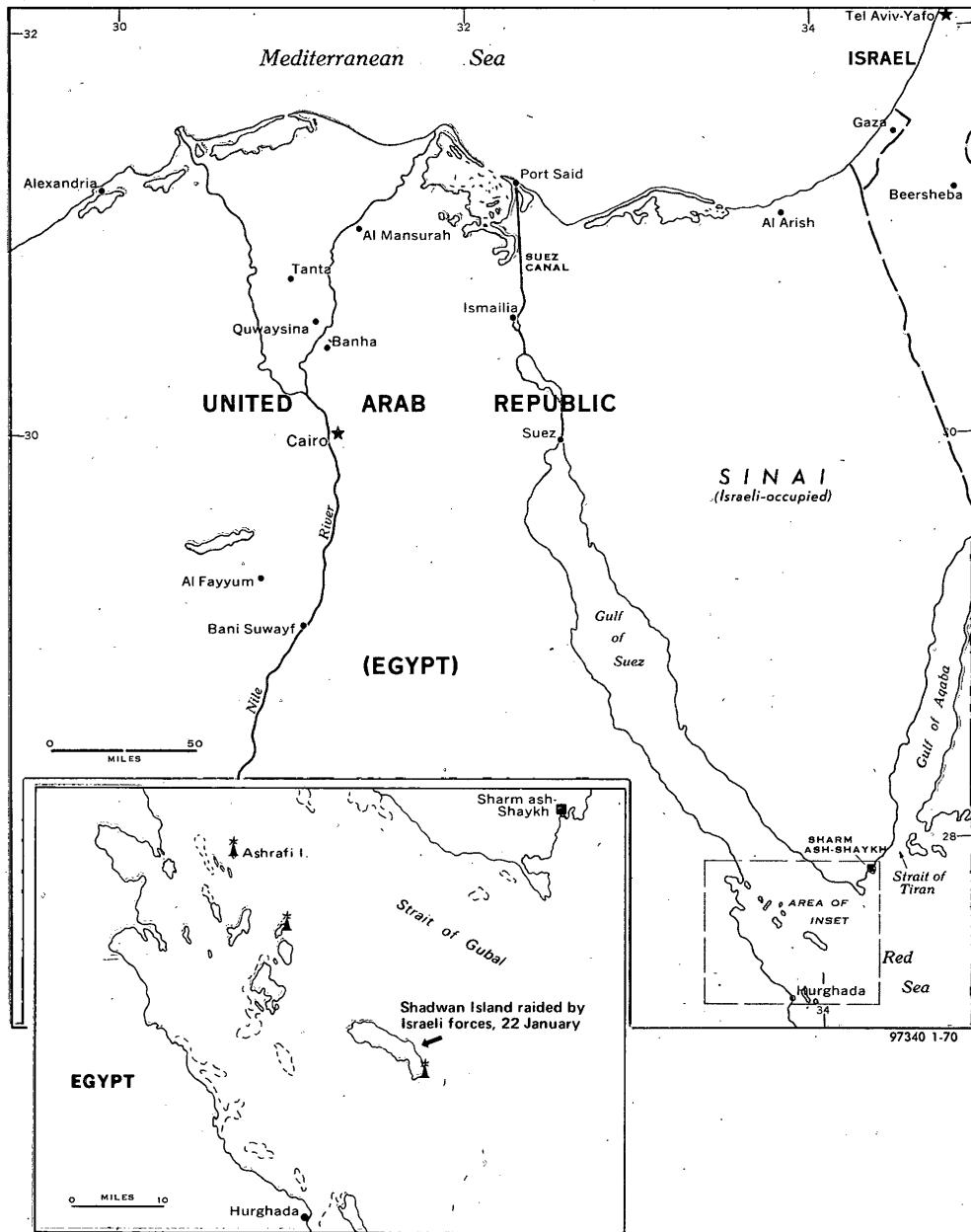
Meanwhile, East German officials have continued to harass West German travelers on the autobahn to West Berlin. Rail traffic has not yet been disrupted, and allied travelers have not been disturbed.

The harassment on the highway has been fairly mild thus far, but it could be stepped up--to include, for instance, a complete stoppage of traffic--during Brandt's visit to Berlin on 25 and 26 January.

The West Germans are convinced that the Communists do not want any really serious trouble over Berlin right now, however. Brandt's letter to Stoph--sent earlier than expected--is partly a sign that Bonn is ready for talks in spite of all the transitory difficulties.

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ISRAELIS RAID EGYPTIAN RED SEA ISLAND



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NOTE

Israel-Egypt: Conflicting claims by spokesmen for both sides have obscured the details of the Israeli invasion of Shadwan Island. During the night the Egyptians made no serious effort to retake the island, and the Israeli troops set about to remove or destroy whatever military items they found there. The Israeli force does not seem adequate to occupy the island for a prolonged period.

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